

Who participated?

WSDOT conducted 10 focus groups, during late September and early October 2003. There were two each in Burien (South King County), Kirkland (east side King County), Seattle, Tacoma (Pierce County) and Everett (Snohomish County). The groups were conducted in the Central Puget Sound area primarily because of the need for information about tolls and HOT lanes, as well as congestion relief.

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**[www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/
focusgroups2003.htm](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/accountability/focusgroups2003.htm)**



WSDOT Focus Groups

*Customer Attitudes about
Transportation Issues*

Fall 2003



Why did WSDOT Conduct Focus Groups?

In recent months, it became apparent that several initiatives within the department would benefit from more input on public attitudes in order to design effective programs such as:

A potential advertising campaign to encourage better driving habits as a means to increase safety and reduce congestion.

The potential future use of tolls and HOT lanes in Central Puget Sound.

Communications efforts regarding new projects included in the 2003 Transportation Funding (“Nickel”) Package and major projects yet to be funded.

The update of the Washington Transportation Plan.

The convergence of these issues and projects provided a timely opportunity to check public attitudes on a number of issues in the course of one focus group program.

Findings

The information in this publication features comments and summaries of what the participants said during the focus groups.

Drive Better Campaign

People were mixed on whether the state ought to promote better driving and if behavior changes would occur. In every group, someone raised the success of “Click it or Ticket” in raising awareness and changing behavior. People who opposed the idea generally believed there were more important items the state should spend its money on. There was nearly universal agreement that if WSDOT were to promote better driving, the agency should work closely with WSP to ensure enforcement occurred.



Communications

People were aware of recent projects completed near where they live and work, although they may not know if it was a WSDOT or locally funded project.

Most people didn’t know what projects were included in the 2003 Legislative Transportation Funding Bill. People want to know there is a project list, with schedule and budget information.

People want to receive project information in a variety of ways: on the website, through email updates, quarterly or annual mailings to their homes, signs at project sites, and updates in newspapers and television.



Most groups wanted to know exactly which projects were being funded by existing transportation taxes, and they wanted to know that those taxes were being spent wisely before approving new funds.

Tolls and HOT Lanes

There was conditional support for placing tolls on expanded or rebuilt roads and bridges if the toll price was reasonably set, if the tolls were removed once the structure was paid for and if there were alternative non-tolled routes available.

There were mixed responses to the HOT lanes concept. Some people thought they were unfair (“only the rich can afford them”) and some thought they were great (“I’d pay to get out of traffic!”).



Most people still envision toll booths that would slow down traffic rather than the electronic systems being investigated. Enforcement to prohibit cheating was seen as crucial if HOT lanes are instituted.

Transportation Funding

No one complained about the nickel gas tax increase.

People are most apt to support tax increases if there is a clear, logical and comprehensive plan that prioritized projects to address regional transportation problems. They want to know how current money is being spent (and that it is being spent wisely) before approving new funds.



People recognize new funds will be needed to meet transportation demands in the Puget Sound area. They’re not crazy about new taxes but think they should relate to the use, i.e. gas tax . . . Sales and property taxes were not supported.

User fees were generally supported.

When it comes to car and licensing taxes, the public is confused about the difference between an excise tax and a flat fee. There were differing levels of support for each type of tax.

Projects and/project selection:

People want to see both roads and transit (transit being generic not specific forms) and they want them to work together in a system. There was little consensus on the proper mix of roads and transit or what type of transit should be funded. Many agreed that transit, to be effective over time, should have a dedicated lane, rail or right-of-way separate from cars.



All groups think the Viaduct is the top priority. A three county funding strategy must improve transportation in each area, and be done in an integrated manner, meaning the improvements should work together.

Other criteria :

- People think projects should be chosen if they improve traffic flow and/or safety.
- Integration between roads and transit
- Cost effective (biggest bang for the buck)
- Provide benefits to business and people
- Improvements should provide benefits for several years.

How WSDOT is using this information?

To develop a small scale promotional/ advertising effort with WSP and the Traffic Safety Commission to encourage better driving. WSDOT is also seeking additional funds from the Legislature to expand the promotion.

To inform decisions and recommendations regarding the potential HOT lane demonstration project on SR 167.

To improve our project communications and make existing information more accessible.

As information to consider in the update to the Washington Transportation Plan.